

c h a p t e r 1

CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE AND NEED

INTRODUCTION

This Statewide Resource Management Plan Amendment (RMPA)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analyzes the effects of adopting standards for public land health and guidelines for livestock grazing management in New Mexico. At the conclusion of this process, a set of standards and guidelines will be approved and incorporated by plan amendment into the eight existing Resource Management Plans (RMPs) that cover approximately 13.5 million acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-administered land in New Mexico. The acreage of public land by RMP are:

RMP Name	Record of Decision Date	Public Land Acreage
Rio Puerco	1/16/86	896,000
White Sands*	9/05/86	2,269,000
Farmington	6/10/88	1,541,000
Taos	7/26/88	564,000
Carlsbad	9/29/88	2,197,000
Socorro	1/29/89	1,518,000
Mimbres*	4/30/93	3,054,000
Roswell	10/10/97	1,490,000
Total		13,529,000
*(portion of the Las Cruces Field Office). Source: Existing BLM RMP's and BLM Files.		

All of the BLM-administered land in New Mexico is managed under completed RMPs.

Public land health is defined as the degree to which the integrity of the soil and the ecological processes of public land are sustained. Public land health exists when ecological processes are functioning properly to maintain the structure, organization, and activity of the system over time. Healthy public land is sustainable, thus ensuring their use and enjoyment for future

generations. Healthy public land also contributes to the social and economic well being and health of many New Mexico communities. Thus healthy communities are in a better position to contribute to healthy public land by conserving and protecting the resources.

Standards describe conditions needed for healthy sustainable public rangelands and relate to all uses of the public land. They provide the measures of resource quality, condition, or function upon which the public land health will be assessed.

It is not possible to determine if every acre meets every standard or for every acre to achieve every standard. Therefore, each standard will be tailored for site-specific types of land. The ecological site is the most logical and practical unit upon which to base an interpretation of rangeland health. An ecological site is a distinctive kind of land with specific physical characteristics that differs from other kinds of land in its ability to produce a distinctive kind and amount of vegetation.

To determine how each standard should be tailored for site-specific situations, a set of measurable indicators and associated criteria will be developed for each ecological site. These indicators and criteria will be used to evaluate the standards and determine rangeland health.

Guidelines are either activity- or use-specific. Guidelines for livestock grazing are management tools, methods, strategies, and techniques designed to maintain or achieve standards. They will apply where the public land does not meet the standards and existing livestock grazing practices are determined to be a contributing factor. Guidelines for activities other than livestock grazing are not mandated through regulation; however, they may be developed should the need arise.

BLM's authority to manage public rangelands is established by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (TGA) and Public Rangeland Improvement

Act of 1978 (PRIA). Through this authority, BLM is responsible for managing resources on public land in a manner that maintains or improves them on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield. In 1994 BLM, through its Rangeland Reform '94 initiative, began developing new regulations for grazing administration. Through this process, which had extensive public involvement, BLM launched its "Rangeland Health" initiative and finalized the new regulations for grazing administration in Title 43 of the Code of Regulations (43 CFR Part 4100; 60 FR 9894) which were adopted by the Department of the Interior and became effective August 21, 1995.

The process for development, approval, maintenance, and amendment of RMPs and their associated EISs was initiated under authority of Section 202(f) of FLPMA and Section 202c of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) 1969. The process is guided by BLM planning regulations (43 CFR 1600-1610), and Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508). This proposed RMPA amendment is in accordance with Federal regulations on grazing (43 CFR 4100), issued on February 22, 1995. The regulations direct implementation of standards and guidelines subject to NEPA and the BLM planning regulations.

Subpart 4180 of the new regulations (see Appendix A), provided that BLM State Directors, in consultation with Resource Advisory Councils (RACs) where they exist, develop state or regional standards and guidelines for approval by the Secretary of the Interior by August 12, 1997. If this did not occur, the fallback standards and guidelines described in Subpart 4180.2 of the regulations would apply. BLM began implementation of the fallback standards and guidelines starting March 1, 1998 where it had been determined that standards were not being met and livestock grazing was a contributing factor. Generally this was where riparian areas were not in properly functioning condition.

The BLM in New Mexico is committed to the development and implementation of locally adapted standards and guidelines. The purpose of developing standards at the state level is to provide an additional opportunity for residents of New Mexico to debate and participate in determining the standards for which the BLM-administered public land will be managed. Additionally, New Mexicans are provided the opportunity to further participate in identification of

livestock grazing guidelines that will be used to assist in meeting the standards on BLM-administered public land in New Mexico.

The proposed standards and guidelines, developed through the New Mexico RAC with considerable public input, are analyzed as the proposed action in this document. The New Mexico RAC is chaired by a Governor's representative and is made up of 15 members of the public and elected officials representing various uses and interests on BLM-administered land.

Following the regulations (43 CFR 4180), the New Mexico BLM initiated a series of five RAC meetings from October 1995 through May 1996, for the purpose of developing the standards and guidelines for New Mexico. Draft standards and guidelines were developed and then taken to the public in a series of scoping meetings in June 1996. Both written and oral comments received during the scoping process were given to the RAC, which convened for three additional meetings in August, September, and October 1996 to develop a proposed action to be analyzed in the NEPA process. At each RAC meeting there was time for the public to address the council with their concerns, followed by questions from the RAC members on those concerns.

The purpose of this RMPA/EIS is to analyze what standards and guidelines should be implemented in New Mexico and the social, economic, and environmental effects of doing so. This EIS process is one step to accomplish these goals in collaboration with the New Mexico RAC and citizens of the State.

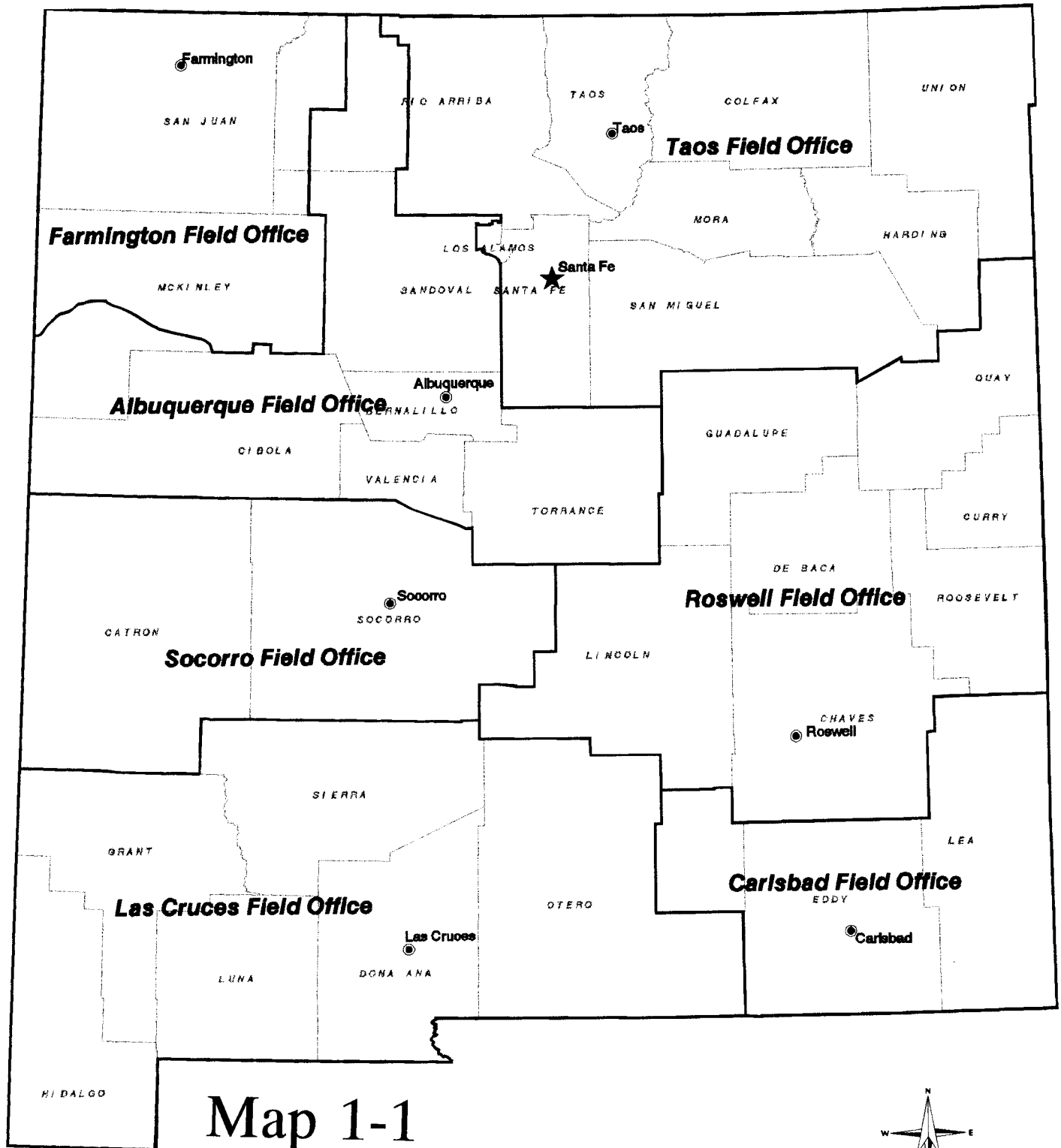
LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The planning area encompasses all surface acreage administered by BLM Field Offices in the state of New Mexico. The boundaries are shown on Map 1-1.

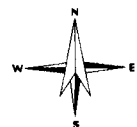
PLANNING AMENDMENT PROCESS

The NEPA/RMPA process consists of the same nine steps used to prepare the RMPs. This process requires the use of an interdisciplinary team of resource

NEW MEXICO BLM Field Offices



Map 1-1



- ★ State Office
- Field Office

specialists for the completion of each step. The steps are described in the planning regulations.

The NEPA/RMPA process began with a Notice of Intent published in the *Federal Register* on January 31, 1996. The Notice of Intent opened the public comment period on the proposal to prepare an environmental document and modify all New Mexico RMPs. A second *Federal Register* notice was published on May 23, 1996, announcing a series of 16 scoping meetings and that the comment period which began with the January Notice of Intent would close June 28, 1996. The comments received at the scoping meetings and through written submissions showed a high level of controversy over the standards and guidelines. Based on this information, it was decided to prepare this EIS to assess, display, and compare the social, economic, and environmental consequences of implementing standards and guidelines according to the requirements of NEPA.

This detailed analysis covers the following four alternatives:

No-Action (Present Management) Alternative
RAC Alternative (Proposed Action) - The
RAC Alternative has been modified based on
public comments and has been selected as the
Proposed Plan)
County Alternative
Fallback Alternative

Present management direction from the RMPs (No-Action Alternative) was analyzed to provide a baseline from which impacts were measured.

An RMPA/EIS team was formed that included representatives from each New Mexico BLM field office and a data contact person from each field office (see list of preparers in Chapter 5). The team met in October 1996 to start the data gathering process and agree on procedures that would ensure a consistent interdisciplinary analysis. In November 1996, the interdisciplinary team was expanded to include team members from the State of New Mexico having knowledge in specific areas (also listed as preparers in Chapter 5).

The Draft RMPA/EIS was published and released for a 90-day comment period, announced by a Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register*, and news releases

in major newspapers throughout the state. The BLM, in consultation with the New Mexico RAC, considered comments received on the Draft RMPA/EIS in the preparation of this Proposed RMPA/Final EIS. The Proposed RMPA/Final EIS will be published and sent to those commenting on the Draft. The Proposed RMPA/Final EIS will be announced by a Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register* and through news releases in major newspapers throughout the State. At this time BLM will submit to the Governor the Proposed RMPA/Final EIS and identify any known inconsistencies with State and local plans, policies, and programs. The Governor will then have 60 days in which to identify inconsistencies and provide recommendations in writing to the State Director. People who have participated in the process and who are adversely affected may protest to the BLM Director. Following resolution of any protest, the standards and guidelines will be forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for approval.

Following the standards and guidelines approval for use in New Mexico, each BLM field office will begin implementation based on the alternative selected. A logical system of prioritization will be adopted due to BLM funding and staffing limitations.

The first step will be to interpret site indicators and develop management targets for the standards that are specific to ecological site. Consistent with recommendations from academic and other rangeland interests, the BLM plans to develop site indicators and targets in consultation with an interagency team of rangeland specialists providing peer review.

Once the management targets are established, the public land can be inventoried to determine areas that meet or do not meet the standards. Consistent with the recommendation by the RAC, a statewide approach to application of the ecological site targets has not been developed by BLM. Each field office will develop priorities and procedures in consultation with the academic institutions, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, State Land Office, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Forest Service, county representatives, other landowners, grazing permittee/lessee and other rangeland interests.

When it is determined that an area does not meet a standard, the BLM will project why the area does not meet the standard. When current livestock grazing

practices are projected to be one of the reasons the livestock grazing guidelines will be applied to the area. When applying the grazing guidelines, the BLM manager will consult with the grazing permittee/lessee and other interested public to develop corrective actions. Specific application of the guidelines would occur at the local level in careful and considered consultation; cooperation; and coordination with lessees, permittees, and landowners involved in accordance with Section 8 of the PRIA. The BLM regulations, 43 CFR Section 4180.2 (c), state that: "the authorized officer shall take appropriate action as soon as practicable but not later than the start of the next grazing year."

When other current activities appear to be the reason the area is not meeting the standard, adjustments in management will be made to the activity as rapidly as practical.

USE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is not a decision document. The document will not be used for day-to-day management of the public land. An EIS is an analytical tool to assist a decision maker in reaching a decision. The decision to be made will be displayed in the Record of Decision that is issued after the Final EIS is published. In this particular case, the Record of Decision will cover the statewide standards, livestock grazing guidelines, and RMP amendments.

ISSUES

The following major environmental issues and concerns are addressed in this document:

- natural resources effects
- multiple use effects
- commodity production effects
- economic and social effects
- statutory rights effects

PLANNING CRITERIA

The planning criteria for this RMPA are the same as those for the RMPs for each of the field offices. Thus planning criteria will be used when each planning

document is to be amended. A copy of the criteria for each of the existing RMPs is available by request from the BLM New Mexico State Office.

RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING PLANS

Existing RMPs were reviewed to determine if the standards and guidelines being developed through the RAC or by the county, and the fallback standards and guidelines conformed to each RMP. The results of the conformance review was documented for each RMP (see Appendix B-1). While most decisions and objectives conformed, a few needed to be modified or replaced. Those that conformed could be clarified through plan maintenance, (see Appendix B-2) while only those to be modified or replaced would have to go through the plan amendment process. All proposed standards and guidelines, however, needed to be taken through the NEPA process. Because of this requirement, and to lessen the confusion and simplify the proposal, it was decided to consider the entire action as a statewide plan amendment. The statewide amendment, once approved, will amend as necessary the eight existing RMPs.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE SELECTION (IN DRAFT)

Following a review of the analysis of the alternatives, BLM selected the RAC Alternative as the Agencies' Preferred Alternative in the Draft document.

The State of New Mexico selected the County Alternative as their preferred alternative. The Lieutenant Governor provided the following three paragraph statement for inclusion in the document:

On behalf of the State of New Mexico I want to thank all the participants who were involved in producing this document. I believe it is the first of its kind that involved state, county and federal participants as equal partners under NEPA. This final product demonstrates that collectively we can provide an equitable response to environmental issues.

The RAC Alternative fully addresses the technical aspects of the environment and considers the human dimension as one of those standards. The County Alternative

recognizes the human dimension to be the major integral component before

implementing the standards. Without the human dimension there is no implementation. The County Alternative gives full consideration toward minimizing any negative impacts in social, economic and cultural areas.

In addition, the County Alternative more clearly focuses and recognizes states' rights and jurisdictions of its natural resources. Therefore, the State of New Mexico requests that strong consideration be given to the County Alternative as the preferred alternative.

PROPOSED PLAN SELECTION

The BLM has selected the modified RAC Alternative as the Agencies' Proposed Plan. The Proposed Plan is in concert with requirements of the regulations (43 CFR §4180).

The modified RAC Alternative (Proposed Plan) was developed by the New Mexico Statewide RAC. Following publication of the Draft RMPA/EIS the RAC considered public comments on the Draft, as well as comments from BLM and recommended a modified RAC Alternative. The RAC members were from various parts of the State and represented various uses and interests in public land. The modified RAC Alternative (Proposed Plan) is included in this Proposed RMPA/EIS on page 2-3 through 2-6.